

NANAWATEY

Some European writers define Nanawatey as grant of asylum to fugitives or extreme hospitality. An experienced British administrator who served as a Political Officer on the Frontier for a fairly long time describes it "an extension of the idea of Melmastia, (Hospitality) in an extreme form, stepped up to the highest degree". But the grant of asylum or sanctuary is only one aspect of Nanawatey while its exact definition and true spirit seems to have been ignored. As a matter of fact, it is a means to end longstanding disputes and blood feuds and transform enmity into friendship. Under Nanawatey a penitent enemy is forgiven and the feuding factions resume peaceful and friendly relations. Thus it creates a congenial atmosphere for peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding through eventual reconciliation.

When a person feels penitent over his past bellicose postures and hostility and expresses a desire to open a new chapter of friendly relations with his foe and live in peace and amity with him, he approaches the tribal elders, Ulema and religious divines for intercession on his behalf for a settlement. In this regard the Jirga's efforts are always countenanced with favor and the very presence of the suppliant in the enemy's Hujra creates a congenial atmosphere for resumptions of friendly relations. The host, who used to scan the neighborhood in an effort to avenge his insult, exercises patience and kindness and gently pardons his opponent for his past misconduct. This is followed by slaughtering of a buffalo, cow, or a few lambs or goats provided by the suppliant. A feast is held in the Hujra and with it the enmity comes to an end.

The customs relating to Nanawatey are more or less identical throughout the Pashtun society. In some parts of the tribal areas, however, there was a custom according to which the suppliant used to go before his enemy with grass in his mouth and a rope round his neck as a mark of humility (this custom no longer exists). Sometimes women bearing the Holy Quran over their heads would approach the enemy's house to plead their family members innocence in any given case. The tribesmen, like Muslims all over the world, have a deep faith in the Holy Quran and they, therefore, regard it as a sacrilegious act to deny the favor asked for through the Holy Book. Besides, the women are held in high esteem by Pashtuns and therefore, a favor solicited through them is seldom denied. Sometimes a man manages to reach his enemy's hearth and stays there till his request for Nanawatey is acceded to. However, if some obstacles lie in the way of acceptance of a Nanawatey then the suppliant bides his time for an opportune occasion such as occurrence of a death in his enemy's family. He hurries to his enemy's village, joins the funeral procession, tries to be one of the pall-bearers and announces his desire for Nanawatey. This evokes a spontaneous feeling of sympathy and the relatives of the deceased readily concede to their erstwhile enemy's desire. It is, however interesting to note that no Nanawatey is accepted in which the honor of the women is involved.

Any one who gains access to a Pashtun's house can claim asylum. He is protected by the owner of the house even at the risk of his own life. Under Panah which is a subsidiary element of Nanawatey one can take shelter under the roof of a Pashtuns' house irrespective of caste, creed, status or previous relations. Though it would seem paradoxical yet Pashtuns on several occasions have provided sanctuary to their deadly enemies. Panah is best illustrated by a story which, according to Mr. Claud Field "is often told on the Frontier". Once a quarrel between a creditor and a debtor resulted in the death of the creditor near his village. The debtor made an un-successful bid to run away, but he was hotly chased by the deceased's relatives. Having failed to escape the assassin approached a village tower and sought refuge in "Allah's Name". The chieftain of the tower, after enquiries from the fugitive realized that he had slain his brother. Instead of avenging his brother's death on the spot, the chieftain calmly said to the fugitive, "you have killed my own brother, but as you have asked for refuge in God's Name, in His name I give it." He was forthwith admitted to the tower and the pursuers sternly forbidden to approach. When they departed, the chieftain gave the refugee an hour's grace to leave the premises and be gone. The refugee made good use of the grace period and escaped death on that occasion, at least.

Another example of asylum, as recorded in books, is that of an old Pashtun woman. It is said that once a gang of dacoits raided a village. The villagers, including the two sons of an old woman, came out to challenge the dacoits. Soon a fierce fight ensued between the two parties in which besides others both the sons of the old woman were also killed. The dacoits having found all escape-routes blocked, sought shelter in the house of the old woman. The pursuers, who were close on their heels, felt delighted that the dacoits were now in their grip. But on approaching the old woman's house, they were deeply annoyed to find their way barred by her. Displaying traditional Pashtun courage she determinedly said that she would not allow any one to lay hands on them. "You don't know" the pursuers angrily said, "they have killed your two sons". "That may be so", she calmly replied, "but they have come Nanawatey to my house and I cannot see anyone laying his hands on them so long as they are under my roof".

The obligation of asylum frequently brought the Pashtuns into conflict with the British during their one hundred years' rule on the Frontier. The government, under various treaties and agreements entered into by the tribesmen with the British and under the principle of territorial responsibility, often insisted that tribesmen should refrain from harboring outlaws, but the Pashtuns considering it as an act against the canons of Pashtunwali, often refused to oblige the authorities in spite of threats of reprisals and severe punishment. The tribesmen's obduracy in this connection, on many occasions, led to dispatch of

military expeditions and economic blockades by the British. They braved all sufferings, bore the brunt of the enemy's attack and suffered losses both in men and material but gallantly refused to hand over the guest outlaws. "In common with all Afghans", writes Claud Field, "the Afridis exercise a rough hospitality and offer an asylum to any fugitive endeavoring to escape from an avenger, or from the pursuit of justice and they would undergo any punishment or suffer any injuries rather than deliver up their guest". The denial of protection, says Sir Olaf Caroe, "is impossible for one who would observe Pashto, it cannot be refused even to an enemy who makes an approach according to Nanawatey."

Ajab Khan Afridi, the hero of the famous Miss Ellis drama took refuge with Mullah Mahmud Akhunzada, a religious divine of Tirah Orakzai after the abduction of Miss Ellis. The British government brought enormous pressure on the Akhunzada to surrender Ajab Khan and his accomplices but he refused to deliver them on the ground that they had taken asylum under his roof and it was contrary to the norms of Pashtunwali to hand them over to the government.

Similarly a few outlaws took asylum with the Jowakis, a clan of the Adam Khel Afridi tribe, in 1877. The government demanded their return but the Jowakis refused to comply with such a request. Ultimately their intransigence over this question brought them into armed clash in which more than 5000 combatants were engaged. According to George B. Scott "every glen and valley of the clan was occupied, every tower destroyed, many cattle died, the families suffered in the wintry cold, only then did the chiefs come into camp and ask for terms. These were a fine in cash, of course but a small fraction of what the expedition had cost the surrender of a certain number of rifles and other weapons in Peshawar and the surrender of two noted outlaws for murderous raids. The chief of the tribe replied "we will pay the fine, we will surrender our arms, but those two men have taken refuge with us. We will not give them up. You are in possession of our country. Keep it, we will seek a home elsewhere, but those men we will not give up. Why will you blacken our faces"? Another example of asylum has been quoted by Major Herbert B. Edwardes, who says that "Raja Heera Singh, when Prime Minister of Lahore, sent an offer of three thousand rupees or 300 pound to Malik Sawab Khan Vezeeree, if he would give up Malik Fatteh Khan Towannuh, who had taken refuge in his mountains, the offer was rejected with indignation."